

THE CONFESSIONS OF A PUBLIC STENOGRAPHER

BY A WASHINGTON WOMAN WHO HAS SPENT FIFTEEN YEARS IN THE BUSINESS

There is no class that has a better opportunity to see the diversity of the masculine mind and the peculiarities of man in general than the women designated as "public stenographers." This is especially true of the profession in Washington, for here gather all sorts and conditions of men and on every variety of errand.

A man in town for perhaps one day desires the services of an expert stenographer and is directed by the hotel clerk to a certain building where he will find Miss So-and-So. He enters a neat, artistic office and is confronted by a business-like young woman sitting in front of her typewriter. He dictates the letter and receives sheets of carefully written, correctly spelled copy. Or, perhaps, the document is a lengthy legal affair and is taken down in shorthand. As each sheet on the stenographer's pad is filled with pot hooks and dots it is turned over to another woman who transcribes quickly and accurately; and by the time the last page of notes is taken the typewritten document is ready for the courts.

But the life of a public stenographer is many-sided; sometimes pathetic, sometimes ridiculous, always interesting.

A Washington woman who has been in the business for fifteen years—in fact the pioneer among the women of the profession who have public offices—was commenting on her experiences recently.

"I have done every imaginable variety of work and I have done many things which I never could have imagined," she said.

From Novels to Love Letters.

"I have written proceedings of ecclesiastical bodies and rules for procedure for cock-fights; descriptions of prize-fights and endless battles of the tongue. I have written applications for every office under the sun—at least every office within the gift of the President—and have written, too often, resignations from office. I have written business contracts of every description, poetry by the yard, statistics galore, newspaper jokes, comic operas, novels, plays, sermons, obituary notices, descriptions of weddings and proceedings for divorce; tiresome tariff documents unnumbered, and arguments on both sides of every question under the sun. As to my own belief, I hadn't the faintest idea where I was at. I have written pages in many languages German, French, Italian, Spanish, and dialect stories which were not in any known or unknown language; ghost stories, love stories, and blood-and-thunder stories by the ream. Yes, all these have I written and more, too.

"Love letters? Lots of them and I don't mean my own either. And three separate times I have written letters for men breaking engagements of marriage. And what is more they were all dictated by educated men who presumably considered themselves gentlemen. Every one of them unhesitatingly gave me the name and address of the lady in question.

Poured Out His Soul.

The first was an editor of a paper. He dictated a lot of editorials and business letters and then one to his lady-love, releasing her from her promise of marriage and assuring her of the highest sentiments of love and esteem and hopes for her future happiness.

"The next case was more thrilling. A wild-eyed man came rushing into my office and said he had some very private work. He walked up and down the floor and poured out his soul in bitter anguish to the fair and false one. It was deeply touching, I assure you—the terms of affection and reproach interspersed with the click of the typewriter and the sound of the bell at the end of each line. I believe he said this was the ninety-seventh letter he had written and if she did not answer this one, he would consider all as over between them.

"Number three was a rosy-cheeked college boy, ardent with his lady-fair. There were several pages of cutting sarcasm at her conduct and when the letter was finished I said: 'Of course you wish to sign this yourself?'

"No," he replied. "Sign it on the machine and then there's a postscript on the other side." And this was the postscript: 'I could not write this letter myself, so I have dictated it to a stenographer over the telephone.' In case she survived the fact of being dictated by a typewriter, there was the added sting that the telephone girl had had an ear in the transaction!

"I've had some awfully funny experience with foreigners who could not

understand me, much better than I could them.

Interviewed His Interviewer.

"One particularly amusing case was when two of the secretaries from the Chinese legation paid me a call. Just previously I had been sent to get the views of the Chinese minister on an important matter. Mr. Wu did not wish to commit himself upon this subject, but the business woman was a new type to him, and so he proceeded to interview me. I wrote to the editor of the paper who had given me the order, furnishing him with the information I had obtained, and saying that Mr. Wu's interview with me was much more successful than mine with him. In response I had a request for my version of Mr. Wu's interview, which I promptly gave. The article was published and widely commented on, and so one day when I saw two Chinamen in my office I did not know but that I had committed some breach of Chinese decorum and they had come to take me to task therefor.

"Their errand was quite innocent, however; they simply wanted to find out the modus operandi of the mimeograph. I explained it the best I could and they looked as wise as the proverbial owl, and asked a hundred questions, but I am morally certain I have not yet made those Chinese officials understand one thing about it.

"Another funny incident was that of a German who was dictating a business letter to a typewriter. We got along fairly well for several pages and then came this astonishing sentence: 'I haf see Mr. Brown an' I tink he will John in the sheep.' I looked up in surprise and he repeated 'John in the sheep.' At last he screamed the sentence at me, but I was still in the dark. Finally, in despair, he said, 'embark in the sheep—in the emterprise,' and then I had it. He simply said in his figurative way that 'Mr. Brown had been seen and that he would join the ship.'

The Man Who Is Never Pleased.

"I have worked for all kinds of people, without regard to sex, age, or previous condition of servitude and have had an opportunity to study every possible type.

"There is the man who is never pleased. The right hand margin is not straight, and after you have made six copies and bound it he will insist upon your taking it apart and correcting it, because in writing rapidly two letters had not spaced properly. It is the only mistake, but he departs, after grudgingly paying his bill, with the air of a martyr.

"There is the man who has five pages to be written and thinks it an immense amount and that he ought to have a discount.

And the man who is afraid he will be cheated; and the one who is sure he won't be, because he does not intend to pay at all.

"There is the man who takes me into his confidence and tells me all his domestic troubles. And the one who is so secretive that he can't give me data enough to do the work intelligently. He deals in abbreviations and will never believe what is a fact—that his business has not the slightest possible interest to me and that if he told me his whole story I would forget before the day is out.

Wanted an Expurgated Edition.

"Some people use me for a policeman, and others for a confessor. And, oh! the lies I've written and the deceptions I have been a party to. Fortunately I feel that I am only a part of the machine and am more accountable than the typewriter.

"One man wanted an expurgated edition of his horoscope. An astrologer had given him an elaborate reading with careful warnings and advice for every month of the year and they all cautioned him against his susceptibility to women and to beware of the fair sex at certain times of the year. When he and I got through with our version of the horoscope it was perfectly safe to send home to his wife and, doubtless, saved her many sleepless nights.

"In this way I come upon many comical, and, alas! some tragic, cases. I would sometimes give a great deal to know the last chapter, but, on the whole, it is better that I should not.

"Then, there is the man who wishes to be 'flirtatious.' He, however, is harmless and quickly learns his lesson.

Has to Edit Copy.

"There is the man who forgets the most important part of his letter and

then gets angry because I am not a mind reader.

"High on the list of qualifications for a stenographer I should write the word 'tact.' One must learn to edit as one goes, too.

"A man was dictating to me one day and his English was something unearthly, but I managed to correct his mistakes as I went along, and when I handed him the completed letter he read it with a beaming face and said: 'I am a pretty good dictator, ain't I?'

"There is the man who expects you to know the exact distance of the sun from the earth and the number of cubic inches in the Washington monument. But the man who is still more annoying is the one who, taking it for granted that you know absolutely nothing, begins a shorthand dictation something like this: 'Washington, D. C., August 20, 1906. Mr. John Dawson, Esquire, New Castle, C-a-s-t-l-e, Pa. Have you got that? Upon being assured that I have, he goes on:

"I am in receipt of your letter—your favor—take out 'letter'—of the 23d instant—take out 'instant' and substitute 'ultimatum'—and in reply would say, 'and so on ad infinitum, ad nauseam, not giving me credit for knowing enough to spell Jones.

"But these are exceptional cases and my work for the most part is very pleasant.

"I am called upon day after day to send capable stenographers here, there



The Case of Dickson's Diamonds

(Continued from Seventh Page.)

is obvious enough, yet I had not suspected it. Plainly those two crimes did not originate in Dickson's brain. I have learned that he has lost heavily on the curb, Jimmie, which doubtless drove him to these felonious designs in the hope of 'keeping above water.' But Dickson's brain never conceived those two masterly schemes."

"You believe—"

"I believe, Jimmie, that some master knave about here suggested them to him, and who wed him the way, yet craftily kept himself in the background. Dickson did the work, and probably his advisers were promised a part of the profit. It may have become Dickson's design to keep the whole, however, the work being successfully done. Hence he must have taken the diamonds to his shore place on his first visit, probably concealing them in the shed from which we saw him emerge."

"Surely! Surely!"

"That his advisers distrusted and subsequently watched him, plainly appears in that they must have followed him there last night. He must have removed the diamonds from the shed, intending to carry them back to town. Instead, he was viciously as-

sailed by the men who had shadowed him, who doubtless meant to end him, as they did, and make off with the entire lot of stones. My shouts alarmed them and drove them to flight, before they could accomplish their object. That we found Dickson clutching the diamonds in his death-grip confirms this theory."

"Indeed, yes! But what do you think he tried to say at the finish? We caught one word, Felix. It sounded like why—or why?"

"It may have meant—why, the beginning of a question," said Boyd. "Or it possibly may have been—Wy, the first syllable of Wykoff?"

"By all the gods, that's so!" cried Coleman. "Meaning that Wykoff was his assassin. If this theory—"

But Mr. Felix Boyd interrupted him with an impressive head-shake.

"There is nothing in theories alone, Jimmie," said he, firmly. "Proofs, not theories, are what we must have. As I have said before, curious things are cropping out about here, and there's a master knave in the background. I mean to find him some day. Meantime, Jimmie, I must prevent his getting a line on me before I get a line on him. So you take all the credit of solving this Dickson mystery, Jimmie, dear fellow, and let me remain obscurely in the background—like the master knave! For when we come together and look horns, Jimmie, as we surely shall, it must be on an equal footing, Jimmie. So, you, dear fellow, take all the credit for recovering Dickson's diamonds."

The third story, "The Case of the Stolen Cipher," will appear in next Sunday's Times.



Poured Out His Soul in Bitter Anguish to the Fair and False One. And Then There's the Man Who Wants to Flirt. Wanted an Expurgated Edition of His Horoscope. The Man Who Tells Her His Troubles. Explaining the Mimeograph to the Chinese Legation.